



familymatters

a newsletter for foster and adoptive families

Published by the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services

Foster Children Should Attend Public School

A new law passed by the 2006 General Assembly (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-133), affirms that all children, including children in foster care, are entitled to receive an education through the public school in their district and should attend public school. The law is consistent with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which requires public schools to make arrangements to serve children with special needs. In rare cases a school may not be able to enroll a child or may determine that the child is better served at home. Foster parents should not make this decision without approval from DFCS.

DFCS believes that going to a public school with other children in the community is best for children in foster care, with few excep-

tions. One benefit is that when the children return to their birth families they will most likely continue their education in a public school, so attending public school while they are in foster care will make the transition easier.

Your DFCS case manager is required to check to make sure foster parents enroll children ages six through 16 in school within two days after they enter the foster home. The case manager will also help you become an advocate for your child at the school, if the child needs help with a physical or learning disability. If a child is already in your care but is being home schooled or attending a private school, the case manager will work with you to determine what school setting is best for the child.

For more information about DFCS' policy on schools for children in foster care, see your case manager. To read the new law online, go to: http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/fulltext/sb618.htm



Resources to Help Children Develop to Their Full Potential

All children under age five who enter foster care in Georgia – and other children at risk for poor outcomes that may interfere with their development – are helped by three important programs designed to make sure they can develop to their full potential. First, a Public Health program called Children 1st helps to identify at-risk children, monitor them, and link them to a primary care physician, public health pro-

grams, and community-based programs as needed. A nurse or other professional from Children 1st will call you and ask to visit your home or schedule a clinic visit to see how the child in your care is developing socially, physically and mentally, compared to other children the same age.

If the child is under three years old and shows signs of a problem or is born with an eligible condition, Children 1st may refer

him or her to the Babies Can't Wait early intervention program for services that can help avoid or lessen the impact of a disability. For example, Babies Can't Wait may refer a child with hearing loss to treatment and to speech therapy that helps caregivers help the child to develop language skills in spite of a hearing problem. Babies Can't Wait case managers will also teach you how to help the child reach his or her full potential despite

Homework and Learning Style

The new school year is fast approaching. Here comes homework hassle! Many homework hassles are created by a mismatch of learning styles and homework assignments. The four major learning styles are Visual/Language Learners, Auditory Learners, Visual Learners and Kinesthetic Learners. Parents can best identify a child's learning style through sharing reading and homework time with their children, resource books, and consultations with teachers.

Listen for the words your child uses to describe the world. Auditory Learners often use the word "hear" when describing an experience. They are strong in their ability to remember conversations, sounds, and music. Visual Learners typically use the word "see" when talking about their world. They describe their experiences in images, sketch, and love tables. Kinesthetic Learners often include the word "do" when talking about their day. They love to fix things, touch things and be in motion.

Imagine your fifth grader has arrived home with two assignments. Assignment number one is to read a short story and answer a set of questions. Assignment number two is a worksheet of math word problems.

Traditionally school assignments are designed for the child who has a Visual / Language style. These are children who love to sit and read. They can read a passage, comprehend the ideas and remember the information. They can read and solve a page of word problems without having to translate the problems. Homework is usually not a hassle for these children.

Traditional school assignments quickly become a challenge for children with alternative learning styles. The Auditory Learner needs material to present in a spoken word format. Words on a page do not register until they are spoken out loud. For this child, parents can offer several modifica-

tions. They should ask the child to attempt the reading task as assigned. Then the child should be invited to read the passage into a tape recorder and listen to the tape. The parent should then read the passage to the child. Now the child should be invited to answer the questions about the passage or chapter. Word problems should be read to the child or presented on tape. These children should be encouraged to discuss the passage, the problems and their answers. They may prefer to dictate their responses and then turn them into written form.

The Visual Learner should be invited to read the passage as assigned. Then the child should be given art materials and asked to draw a picture of what the passage says or illustrate the key ideas in a chapter. Encourage your child to imagine a movie that "brings the story to life." The questions should be answered with a combination of written words and images. The format of a graphic novel is a very powerful tool for Visual Learners. (Parents who are not familiar with graphic novels may wish to visit the graphic novel section in a local bookstore.) Use color markers and highlighters to mark key concepts and ideas (on a worksheet). Use post-its to highlight school materials. Encourage children to visualize and use pictures to solve problems.

The Kinesthetic/Spatial Learner needs to have the material translated into action.

They should attempt the assignment as presented. The parent should read the material to the child. These children should learn to type and be permitted to type their answers to the questions on a computer. (The teachers will appreciate the neat responses.) These children often do not work well sitting still. Provide many breaks. Encourage physical activity. They may need to doodle or fiddle while they work. Consider taking dictation so they can walk around as they answer the questions about the reading assignment. Translate word problems into action with mini-models (real money for money problems, cars for mileage problems, clocks for time).

Matching your children's learning style to their homework will result in success. Homework will become a task, not a hassle. Our children's individual strengths and styles make our world a garden with a variety of beautiful flowers and trees (musicians, mechanics, artists, athletes, scientists, and writers). Recognizing a child's learning style helps our children blossom and grow.

Resources:

- **Discover your Child's Learning Style**, by Mariaemma Willis, M.S. and Victoria Kindle Hodson, M.A.
- **Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius and In Their Own Way**, both by Thomas Armstrong.

NOTE: Children with identified learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders will need to have modifications of homework assignments included in their Individualized Educational Plans. Parents will need to consult with school staff to learn how to modify homework for these youngsters.

Wendy Haus Hanevold, Ph.D., consultant, DFCS Treatment Services Unit

PLEASE SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

Family Matters reaches over 10,000 foster and adoptive parents. We are proud that we can provide you with this information. *However, printing and postage costs are high.*

Please help us cut costs and send Family Matters to you faster.

If you send your **name, zip code and email address** to familymatters@dhr.state.ga.us we will email you future issues. Also, at any time, anyone can read the newsletter on the Web at dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/familymatters.

Time for School Already? Get the Children Their Shots

Yes, it's just around the corner! Soon our 5-year-olds will be heading off to school, outfitted with new backpacks, sharpened pencils, and maybe a little anxiety about what they will be experiencing. Keep them safe in their new surroundings by making sure they are protected against vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, and whooping cough, among others. Take foster children to your health care provider or the local health department to have their immunization records checked.

Children start getting their immunizations as newborns and continue with the

vaccine series as they go to the doctor or clinic for checkups. Most finish their shots by the time they are 2 years old. However, there are a few vaccines that need to have booster doses before a 5-year-old child can enter kindergarten. The booster doses are for the child's protection and to meet the state of Georgia's requirements for school attendance. Most children will need a 2nd dose of MMR, a dose of DTaP, and possibly polio vaccine. They may need other immunizations such as chickenpox (varicella) and hepatitis B to be current with their vaccine schedule. Be sure to tell the doctor or nurse that you

need the Georgia Certificate of Immunization or Form 3231 to take to the school, so they know your child is fully immunized.

As you prepare to send your eager 5-year-olds off for that important first day of school, give them a great start by making sure they are protected from vaccine-preventable diseases.

For more information on vaccines for children, visit <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/immunization>, or call the Division of Public Health's Immunization Program at 404-657-3158.

Foster Parents Honored

Governor Sonny Perdue honored foster families this spring by proclaiming May Foster Care Month in Georgia. May was also National Foster Care Month. At the proclamation signing ceremony on May 15 the governor welcomed representatives of the Adoptive and Foster Parents Association of Georgia and Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) staff. A former foster parent himself, the governor expressed appreciation for the parents' contribution, adding: "You all are some of the

most wonderful people in the world."

Other Foster Care Month activities included recognition of a Foster Parent of the Year by most Georgia county Departments of Family and Children Services. DHR supplied county staff with plaques to present to these outstanding parents, signed by DFCS Director Mary Dean Harvey.



Help Find a Home for Sabrina, Aleta and Chris

Sabrina and her siblings, Aleta and Chris, were born 10/92, 11/93 and 10/94. They are bright and easy-going children.

Sabrina is bubbly and outgoing. She is well-liked by both peers and adults. Sabrina enjoys running track, swimming and watching television. She is enrolled in regular education classes, and her favorite subjects are math and social studies. Although Sabrina does well in school, she will benefit from extra assistance with her school work.

Aleta is friendly and outspoken. She enjoys going to church, swimming and shopping. Aleta excels academically. Enrolled in regular education classes, she loves science, spelling and reading. Aleta hopes to become an attorney or a doctor.

Chris is an energetic child with a bright smile. He is most happy when spending time with friends. Chris enjoys watching television, particularly the Cartoon Network. He also likes to play football and basketball. Chris is enrolled in regular education classes and he makes good grades. His favorite subject is math.

Sabrina, Aleta and Chris are closely bonded to each other. They need to be adopted together. A patient and devoted family is needed for these children, one who will love them unconditionally while nurturing their positive growth.

If you would like to learn more about Sabrina, Aleta, and Chris, or about adoption, please call My Turn Now at 1-800-603-1322.



Promoting Safe and Stable Families

This year, Georgia celebrates the 10th anniversary of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF), an initiative that is strengthening Georgia families.

Georgia's PSSF program was created by an act of Congress and is administered through the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS). The program provides federal funding, training and technical assistance to community-based nonprofit organizations to help vulnerable families stay together. The PSSF program has helped DFCS reemphasize its efforts to maintain and strengthen the family unit. Last year alone, over 18,000 families, including over 27,000 children, were served through this initiative.

The assistance provided by PSSF includes services to improve parenting skills; help for families in crisis; providing resources to reunify families whose children have been placed in foster care;

and independent living services for children "aging out" of foster care. PSSF has also supported the creation of visitation centers across the state, which offer a place for family visits and related services to help families

get back together. When children cannot be safely reunited with their families, the PSSF program works with local communities to promote adoption of kids out of the foster care system.

For more information on the Promoting Safe and Stable Families network visit <http://www.pssfnetwork.com/>.



TeenWork: 2nd year for Summer Job Program

For six weeks this summer, hundreds of foster children ages 14-21 will again have an opportunity to gain work experience and earn a paycheck. The TeenWork program is a project of the First Lady's Children's Cabinet in collaboration with both public and private agencies, including the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Human Resources, and the Department of Juvenile Justice, as well as several private businesses across the state.

The goal of the TeenWork experience is to help Georgia youth who are in foster care become successful, independent young adults by giving them an opportunity to work in a variety of settings so they can develop marketable skills.

"Teens who are involved in positive activity at work and in the community are also more likely to get their high school degree and become self-sufficient adults. It is vital that we get our teens into work and other positive activities," said DHR Commissioner B.J. Walker.

Last year, over 500 teens secured employment through the TeenWork program and an additional 200 foster teens found summer employment on their own. During that time these teens made a lasting impression on

their employers, while gaining a better understanding of the professional world. This year, another 500 teens have been placed in jobs through TeenWork.

Studies have found that youth who have jobs while still in foster care are more successful at keeping jobs and leading productive lives after they leave care. TeenWork seeks to help teens in foster care have a positive work experience and gain marketable skills. Many teens will be mentored as they enter their first summer jobs.

The Independent Living Program in the Division of Family and Children services has been working hard to promote this program. Additional information can be found at teenwork.dhr.georgia.gov

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

My husband and I became foster/adoptive parents at the end of last year. We have three biological children of our own and now have three foster children whom we are adopting.

I wanted to tell you how much I enjoy reading the Family Matters newsletter!

My agency doesn't always know what is available to us as foster parents, so I was thrilled to see the article "Take the Children Some Place Special" Please let me know if there are any other resources like that to take advantage of.

Have a Blessed Day!

Dean'Na Barnes

Thank you for your kind note. Previous issues of this newsletter describe other resources. You can find them at dfcs.dhr.georgia.gov/familymatters.

The Editor

Fall Training Opportunities

The Georgia Center for Resources and Support: Serving Adoptive and Foster Families (GACRS) will hold a training conference for parents and professionals on September 8th and 9th, 2006. The conference will be held in Atlanta and teleconferenced across the state. Locations for the teleconference will be announced on the GACRS Website: www.gacrs.org. The Friday, September 8th session will be for professionals; Saturday's will be for parents. Each session will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Denise Goodman, a nationally known adoption trainer, will address both sessions on the "how to's" of placing teenagers in adoptive families.

In October 2006 GACRS will host a Fall Statewide Conference (date and location to be announced on the GACRS Website), and Winter and Spring conferences during 2007. Each conference will

give foster parents an opportunity to receive five of their licensure hours and a certificate of attendance. All trainings provided by GACRS are free.

Please check the GACRS Website on a regular basis for updates on trainings. Better yet, add your email address to GACRS' listserv and you will receive email announcements of upcoming training events.



New Foster Parents Per Diem and Sibling Incentive

Effective July 1, 2006, the Family Foster Care Basic Service Rate for the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is:

- For each child from birth through age five: \$14.18

- Age six through age 12: \$16.00

- Age 13 and over: \$18.25

In addition, to help keep siblings together, a Sibling Incentive (Sib-I) for each child is provided to both DFCS relative and regular

foster homes that care for three or more siblings, in addition to the monthly per diem amount for all children. For example: Jane, Daniel and Marla are placed in a DFCS family foster home.

The total per diem amount for each child for the month is reimbursed to the foster parent along with an additional \$300.00 (\$100.00 each for Daniel, Marla and Jane) as the Sib-I.

Resources to Help Children Develop to Their Full Potential

CONTINUED FROM COVER

having a disability. Some simple exercises or techniques you can learn to use at home may make a big difference in how well the child does while in your care and later in life.

Babies Can't Wait works in partnership with parents and foster parents to develop a plan of care for the child and for the family so they can help the child. Some children coming into foster care have received services in the past from Babies Can't Wait. The DFCS case manager should inform you of this.

Both Children 1st and Babies Can't Wait are voluntary services, but DFCS urges you to welcome them. Even if a child seems perfectly healthy and smart there may be signs of a problem that only trained professionals can detect. The earlier children receive help when a problem arises, the less likely they are to become disabled or behind in their development later on.

When a child under the age of three needs help, Babies Can't Wait asks the birth family to authorize the services, but if the child is in foster care the foster parent can be a "surrogate" or substitute for that purpose. Babies Can't Wait provides surrogate training that teaches about child development and what the program offers, though it may not be necessary in all situations. The surrogate training would count toward your foster parent training requirements.

For children aged three to five who are no longer in Babies Can't Wait, and for children birth to five who are not eligible for Public Health's programs for children with special needs, Children 1st will continue to follow their progress but the services offered will be less intensive than for those offered by Babies Can't Wait. They may make referrals to services and supports if a problem develops or just keep in touch to make sure the children get regular medical checkups.



When children receiving services through Babies Can't Wait reach age three, the program helps them and their families access preschool special education services offered by the Department of Education, if the children are eligible.

This is the third resource that may be available to the child in your care.

Children placed in foster care have a higher rate of developmental disability than other children do. They may have missed out on medical attention or the stimulation small children require to develop their bodies and minds. If so, they will need your help to reach their full potential. Children 1st, Babies Can't Wait and the Department of Education can provide the resources you need to make a difference for those children.

For more information about Children 1st see <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/childrenfirst/>, and for Babies Can't Wait see <http://health.state.ga.us/programs/bcw/>.

DHR OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
2 PEACHTREE STREET NW
SUITE 29.426
ATLANTA GA 30303-3142

A Foster Care Survival Guide

Paul Knowlton, a Georgia attorney who with his siblings spent many years in foster care (in New Jersey) and is now a member of the Georgia Association of Homes and Services for Children, has written a book titled *The Original Foster Care Survival Guide*, which can be read as an e-book at no charge through the Internet.

Knowlton hopes the book will be useful to foster care providers and mentors as well as current and former foster teens who want a “game plan” for taking responsibility for their own future. He explains that he has given a lifetime of thought to questions regarding his foster care experience, including “What could I have done to make the job of my social workers and foster parents easier?” and “What could they have done to help me prepare for a successful adulthood?” As a teenager he looked for a foster care survival guide, “like the military survival manuals that teach soldiers how to prevail over an enemy,” but never found one. “Since then I have graduated

from college and law school, the pain of my early hardship is behind me, and I thoroughly enjoy my life,” he says. The book shares the lessons he learned while making this transition.

In his book, Knowlton tells the story of Pete, a blind foster child, and his mentor Sage, herself a former foster child and an attorney, through their respective points of view as they get to know each other. The story starts when Pete learns to trust Sage enough to ride with her around Atlanta on a tandem bicycle. After that, he agrees to let her help him learn how to plan what he will do when he “ages out” of care and is on his own.

Note: This book contains some adult language, and some long passages dealing with philosophy and theology at an advanced reading level that are intended mainly for the foster care provider or mentor. The book expresses solely the author’s point of view.

The Original Foster Care Survival Guide, which is copyrighted, can be found at www.sagesjournal.com.

The purpose of Family Matters is to strengthen the relationship between resource parents and the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR); supplement foster and adoptive parents’ training; and keep parents up to date about

new policies and services. It is published by the Division of Family and Children Services

Please send us your comments and ideas for articles you would like to see in Family Matters to Barbara Joye, DHR Office of Communications,

Two Peachtree Street NW, Suite 29-426, Atlanta, GA 30303 or brjoye@dhr.state.ga.us.

Please also let us know if you do NOT want to receive future issues.